

Information for monthly Regional Intelligence Snapshot

Suffolk | 18 March 2010

Produced by Research and Intelligence Team | Suffolk County Council

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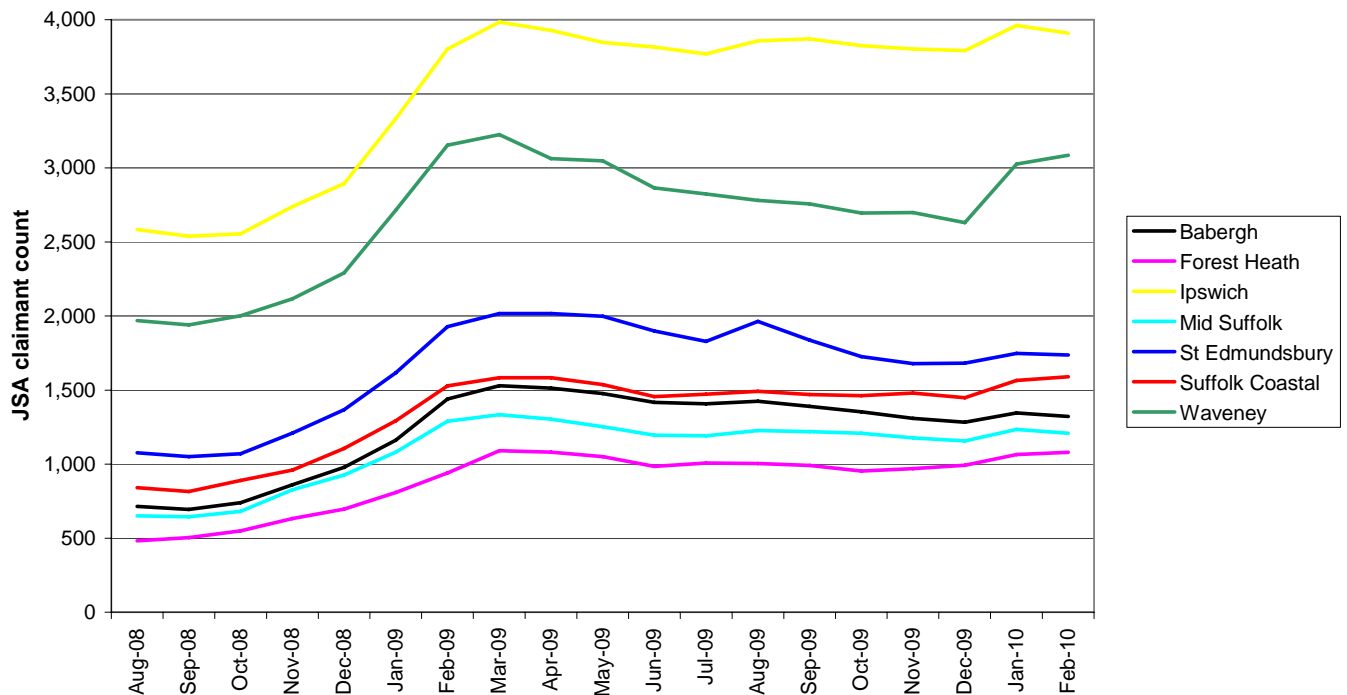
SUMMARY OF ECONOMIC CONDITIONS (E.G. BUSINESS CONFIDENCE, BUSINESS CONDITIONS – OUTPUT, ORDERS, EXPORTS, ETC, LABOUR MARKET, HOUSING MARKET, ANY INDUSTRY SPECIFIC TRENDS)

SUMMARY

- The Job Seekers Allowance claimant count has fallen by 0.1% from January to February following a substantial rise in January, contrasting considerably with the trend at this time in 2009. The regional and national figures saw a slight increase in claimants, and the Suffolk claimant rate remains below the regional and national average. The largest increase in claimants was in Waveney (though only 1.95%, 59 claimants) and the largest fall was in Mid Suffolk (2.19%, 27 claimants). Data from Jobcentre Plus/NOMIS.
- There were around 189 redundancies during February (as reported by Jobcentre Plus and local press).
- The total number of redundancies in Suffolk now stands at 5,106 since October 2008 (as reported by Jobcentre Plus and local press).
- However, there have been at least 2,027 full and part-time jobs created in Suffolk since the beginning of 2009 (as reported by Jobcentre Plus and local press).
- NEET (16-18 year-olds Not in Education, Employment or Training) figures in the county fell by 58 in February from 1,344 in December, completing three successive months of declines. (Connexions).
- Average house prices in Suffolk fell for the first time since May 2009 according to the latest available data from the Land Registry.

LABOUR MARKET

Job Seekers Allowance claimant count by district August 2008 to February 2010



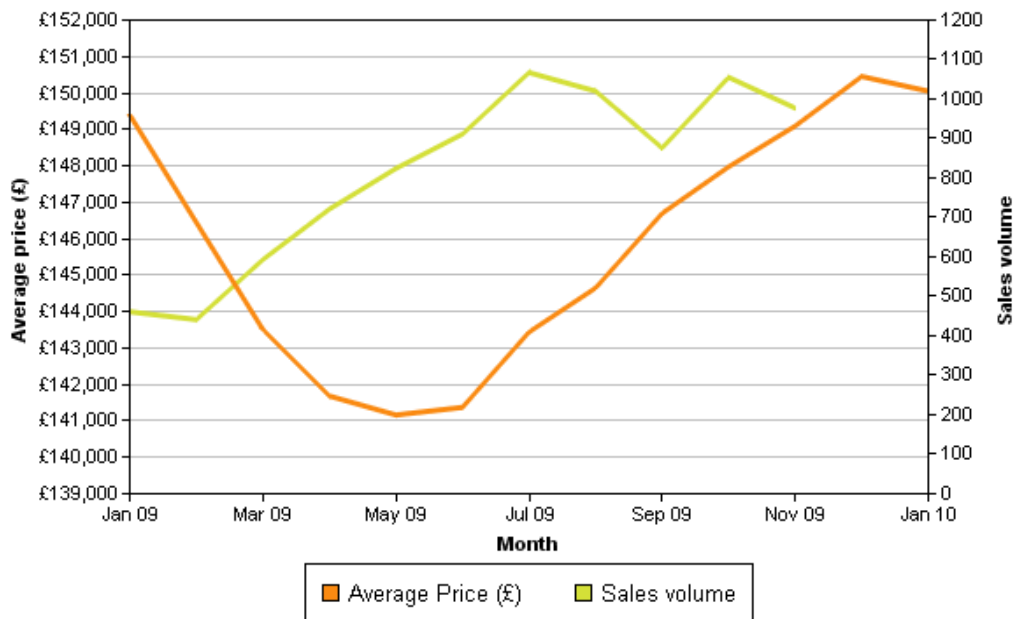
- The Suffolk Job Seekers Allowance claimant count saw a slight decline from January to February, going against the regional and national trend, which both recorded a small increase (though in all cases the changes are negligible). Suffolk's figures decreased very slightly from 13,944 in January to 13,930 in February (a drop of 0.10%, 14 claimants). The claimant count levels therefore remain similar to those last recorded in May-June 2009, but remains below the highest level seen during this recession, 14,764 in March 2009. The percentage of the working age population in Suffolk claiming JSA now sits at 3.3%, compared to a high point of 3.5% in March 2009.
- The Suffolk figures contrast slightly with the overall trend of the East of England this month, which recorded a small increase in JSA claimants from January to February (0.11%, 141 claimants). Therefore, the percentage of the working age population claiming JSA in Suffolk is still lower than in the East of England as a whole (3.3% in Suffolk compared to 3.6% in the East of England). JSA claimants also increased across the country as a whole, with the claimant rate in England and Great Britain standing at 4.3%. The regional and national claimant count is now at its highest point during the current recession and the highest since April 1997, topping 1.6million people.
- Three of the seven districts in Suffolk recorded an increase in claimants from January to February. Waveney saw by far the largest increase for the second month in succession (1.95%), followed by Suffolk Coastal (1.60%) and Forest Heath (1.41%). The remaining four districts recorded slight drops in claimant numbers of between -2.2% and -0.6%.
- The trend in the claimant count from January to February 2010 contrasts markedly with those one year ago, when February 2009 saw more than a 17% rise on the preceding January.
- NEET (16-18 year-olds Not in Education, Employment or Training) figures in the county fell by 58 in February from 1,344 in January. NEET figures have now declined for three months in succession. Figures from Connexions.

HOUSING MARKET

House Price Index report - Suffolk (January 2009 - January 2010)

| Month | Index | Average Price (£) | Monthly Change (%) | Annual Change (%) | Sales Volume |
|----------------|-------|-------------------|--------------------|-------------------|--------------|
| January 2009 | 265.2 | 149,395 | -1.2 | -14.4 | 461 |
| February 2009 | 260 | 146,446 | -2.0 | -16.0 | 441 |
| March 2009 | 254.8 | 143,507 | -2.0 | -16.9 | 593 |
| April 2009 | 251.5 | 141,682 | -1.3 | -17.8 | 721 |
| May 2009 | 250.6 | 141,161 | -0.4 | -17.3 | 824 |
| June 2009 | 251 | 141,370 | 0.1 | -16.6 | 911 |
| July 2009 | 254.7 | 143,437 | 1.5 | -15.1 | 1,067 |
| August 2009 | 256.8 | 144,646 | 0.8 | -13.2 | 1,020 |
| September 2009 | 260.4 | 146,695 | 1.4 | -10.2 | 876 |
| October 2009 | 262.7 | 147,973 | 0.9 | -7.1 | 1,055 |
| November 2009 | 264.7 | 149,093 | 0.8 | -4.2 | 977 |
| December 2009 | 267.1 | 150,452 | 0.9 | -0.5 | - |
| January 2010 | 266.4 | 150,048 | -0.3 | 0.4 | - |

House price and sales volume - Suffolk



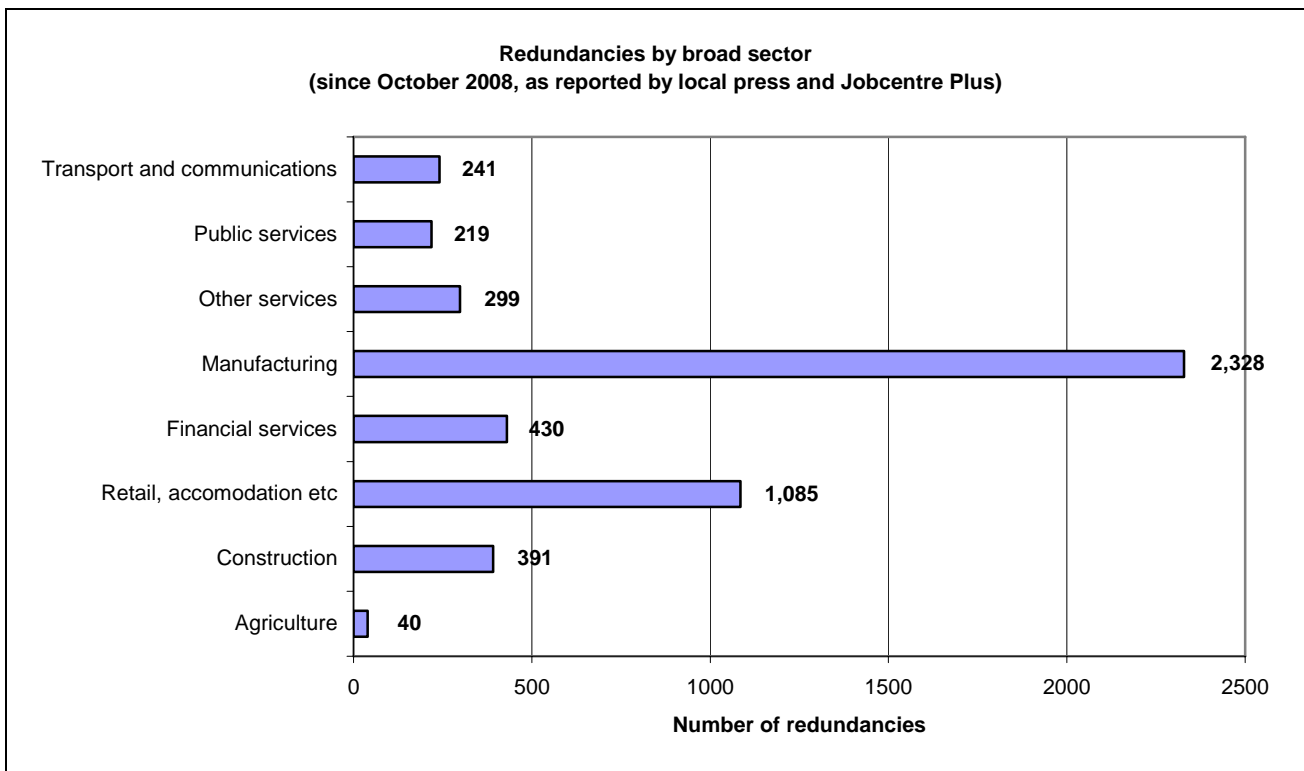
- Average prices in Suffolk fell for the first time since May 2009 according to the latest available data (January 2010).
- The fall for the month of January was £404.
- Average price now sits at £150,048, back to levels experienced a year ago in December 2008 and January 2009.
- Sales volumes decreased in November following a rise in October, however no data is provided for the two most recent months.

Data from the Land Registry <http://www.landregistry.gov.uk/>

- The number of mortgages approved for people buying a home dived by 17% during January as the housing market suffered a steep fall in activity, according to figures released in early March. A total of 48,198 loans were in the pipeline for house purchase during the month, the lowest level since May 2009 and the second consecutive monthly drop, according to the Bank of England. There was also a fall in mortgage advances, with gross lending sliding to £10.24billion, down from £13.53bn in December. However unsecured lending was surprisingly strong during the month, with people borrowing an extra £500million through credit cards, loans and overdrafts. EADT 2/3/10

INDUSTRY-SPECIFIC TRENDS

- The recovery of the **manufacturing** sector remained on track as figures released in March showed expansion at another 15-year high last month. The Chartered Institute of Purchasing and Supply (CIPS) said production increased for the ninth consecutive month in February. Its monthly headline activity index, where any score over 50 registers growth, showed a reading of 56.6, unchanged on January and the highest since October 1994. CIPS said firms were benefiting from successful product launches and clients rebuilding their inventories. Growth of new export orders accelerated to its fastest since at least January 1996, with gains linked to higher sales in the United States and Asia, supported by the weakness of sterling. CIPS chief executive David Noble said: "We're really seeing signs that seem to point towards a full sector recovery. Most notably, companies reported that higher demand from export markets wasn't just on the back of the softer sterling but also improving global market conditions." However, he warned the recovery was threatened by inflationary pressures, such as higher energy prices, and expected fiscal tightening measures. Howard Archer, chief economist at HIS Global Insight, said the figures boosted hopes that the economy would keep on growing in the first quarter of 2010 after exiting recession in the fourth quarter of 2009. EADT 2/3/10. Manufacturing is an important sector in Suffolk, employing over 12% of the workforce in the county (ONS Annual Business Inquiry, 2008), and has been hit particularly hard in the county during this recession, with more than 46% of recorded redundancies being made at manufacturing companies.
- The graph below shows redundancies by sector, as reported by Jobcentre Plus and local press.



- Hefty weather-related payouts and the impact of the recession contributed to fall in profits at the UK arm of **insurance** giant Axa last year – but the company said yesterday the prospects for 2010 were positive. Axa's underlying earnings in the UK and Ireland, where its operation includes a major office in Ipswich, fell by 18% from £288million in 2008 to £235m last year. The result was "significantly impacted" by the economic climate and also by large exceptional items including "severe weather events" and commercial losses within its general insurance business totalling £157m. In June 2009, 120 staff at the Axa offices in Ipswich lost their jobs. EADT 19/2/10

KEY CHALLENGES AND HOTSPOTS (E.G. BUSINESS FEEDBACK ON GOVERNMENT POLICY, INVESTMENTS UNDER THREAT, SKILLS SHORTAGES, IMPACT OF BUSINESS CLOSURES, AREA-BASED CHALLENGES...)

- Thousands of jobs set to be created by the growth of the UK's offshore wind industry could go overseas if the opportunity to boost skills is not taken now, experts have warned. There have been four major job-creation projects in the sector in the UK recently (including those at Glasgow, Teeside and in Wales), and more are expected, with Suffolk in a good position to capitalise with the renewables hub developing in Lowestoft. Maria McCaffery, chief executive of Renewables UK, which represents the wind and tidal energy sectors, said she was optimistic these projects and massive future job creation would go ahead. She said offshore wind energy could create the next industrial boom in the UK, but for UK workers to benefit, upskilling existing and future workers must be a priority, she said.
"Make no mistake, part three offshore wind is going to happen, it's so big and bold, there's so much interest and the Crown Estate has allocated the sites," said Ms McCaffery. "I don't want UK plc looking on in horrified disbelief, complaining in 10 years' time that it's all been delivered by an overseas-based workforce. This employment opportunity offers tremendous growth from where we currently stand, which is about 5,000 (UK workers) employed in renewable energy at the moment. We are looking at taking that to between 45,000 and 60,000." She said it was not an exaggeration to compare the potential of offshore wind to create jobs with the number created when gas was discovered in the North Sea more than 40 years ago.
Transferable skills already exist among UK engineers and other offshore workers and Ms McCaffery said it could extend the professional life of people in the energy sector if they moved to a different part of the sector. But the big challenge is to prepare the technological skills base the sector will need in five to seven years' time. Ms McCaffery warned that a lack of physics teachers in schools could mean the UK doesn't have enough qualified electrical engineers in the future to work in offshore wind. EADT 10/3/10
- Suffolk is in the middle of a learning revolution to meet the challenges of a fast-changing world. Between now and 2013, the education system for 14-19 year-olds will be transformed to equip young people with the skills they need for life and work in a global marketplace. The changes include the introduction of the new secondary curriculum and a wider range of learning pathways for young people, who will be continuing in education and training for longer when the participation age rises to 17 in 2013 and to 18 in 2015.
The idea is to give all 14-19 year-olds the chance to choose different styles of learning in the setting that best suits their needs, interests and learning styles.
Suffolk County Council is leading this huge transformation by working closely with schools, colleges, universities, training providers and employers.
By 2013, young people under the age of 19 will have a choice of four main pathways for gaining the skills and qualifications they need to succeed. These include: updated GCSEs/A-levels, new Diplomas, more Apprenticeships, and personalised Foundation Learning. There will also be a new Employment with Training route for post-16s in work. For more information see:
http://www.suffolkchamber.co.uk/news/chamber_news/new_choices_for_14_to_19_year_olds
- The Prime Minister refused to commit to major spending schemes planned for Suffolk in the next five years which are threatened by public sector cuts. On his visit to the county, he was asked whether money would be found to complete the abolition of middle schools, the dualling of the A11 trunk road, and the Ipswich anti-flood barrage. Both Labour and the Tories have warned of tough economic times ahead, raising fears that after the General Election, funding for schemes will be put on hold or abandoned. EADT 16/2/10
- Business failures in East Anglia fell for the third consecutive quarter during the final three months of 2009. Figures compiled by regional business rescue and insolvency specialist McTear Williams & Wood show that 70 firms in Suffolk, north Essex, Norfolk and Cambridgeshire were declared insolvent during the fourth quarter, down from 99 for the same period in 2008. The 29% fall was more than twice the 14% decline recorded across the UK as a whole, but the firm warns that the outlook for 2010 is less encouraging. Andrew McTear, a partner at McTear Williams & Wood, said the recovery from recession was likely to be "slow and bumpy at best". "Despite this recession being longer and sharper than the recession in the early 1990s, it does seem that the massive Government/central bank stimulus has kept the lid on the number of business failures for now," he said. "The question is whether this action stopped company insolvencies or simply delayed them. Some increase from the current surprisingly low level of corporate insolvencies is widely predicted, even if the recovery continues as business insolvencies tend to lag the general economy by 18 months." EADT 20/2/10

BUSINESS SPECIFIC INTELLIGENCE (E.G. REDUNDANCIES, NEW JOBS OR BUSINESSES AT RISK) / INFORMATION ON KEY QUESTIONS*

REDUNDANCY TOTAL

- According to information from Jobcentre Plus and local press, the total number of redundancies to have taken place in Suffolk since October 2008 now stands at **5,106**.
- In February, 189 redundancies were recorded, with the vast majority of them taking place (or to take place in the near future) at Vion in St Edmundsbury. In February 2009, 254 redundancies were recorded across the county. So far in March we have heard of 136 potential redundancies during the month, compared to just 5 this time last year. It is unclear whether there will be noticeable second round of redundancies, though with SLP Engineering Ltd and Elizabeth Hotels Ltd still in administration there are fears that a significant number of additional redundancies will take place.

NEW JOBS, EXPANSIONS | REDUNDANCIES, BUSINESSES AT RISK

COUNTY-WIDE

- The Ipswich Building Society has defied the turmoil in the financial sector by recording an increased asset base and higher lending activity during 2009. The society's balance sheet grew by £39million, or 9%, to £462m, with mortgage and savings balances both growing strongly. Gross mortgage lending in 2009 was £75.7m, with a total of £332m outstanding at the year end, while savings balances increased by £32m to £374m. The society also maintained a high liquidity level "significantly above the industry average". Pre-tax profit totalled £384,000, reduced to £271,000 after tax. EADT 9/3/10
- The administrators of the Suffolk-based Elizabeth Hotels chain has confirmed the sale of another one of its properties, and said they remained hopeful of finding buyers for more. Accountants KPMG said the Humber Royal Hotel in Grimsby had now been sold, in addition to the Humber Crown Hotel near Hull, the sale of which was completed in December. The administrators were appointed shortly before Christmas at three businesses forming part of the Ryan Elizabeth Holdings group owned by Suffolk property entrepreneur Richard Cattermole. The businesses in administration are Elizabeth Hotels Ltd, Cavendish Hotels Ltd and Elizabeth Estates (BS) Ltd. Between them, they operated a total of 11 hotels and 13 pubs. The hotels include the Hotel Elizabeth, Copdock, the Mill Hotel in Sudbury, the Limes Hotel in Needham Market, the Rose & Crown in Haverhill and Hotel Hatfield in Lowestoft. Pubs affected include the Cock Inn at Polstead, near Hadleigh, the Three Tuns, Needham Market, the White Hart, Boxford and the Five Bells at Rattlesden, near Bury St Edmunds. EADT 17/2/10

BABERGH

- One of Suffolk's best-known beauty spots is to get a £230,000 facelift to breathe new life into its ancient character. The Hard, in front of the Butt and Oyster pub in Pin Mill, is set to be restored in a move which will tidy up the area and also create space for Thames sailing barges to be restored and maintained. EADT 27/2/10
- According to a retail vacancy survey by the Local Data Company, Sudbury saw an 11.6% rate of empty town centre retail units in December, above the national average of 7%. However, there has been considerable scepticism over the accuracy of the report (see Ipswich and St Edmundsbury items). EADT 20/2/10

FOREST HEATH

- Brandon-based concrete masonry firm Lignacite has been experiencing recent short term cash-flow problems, though funding from EEDA secured with assistance from Forest Heath District Council has alleviated any immediate threat. (Thanks to Masart Razaq at Forest Heath District Council for this item).

IPSWICH

- Ipswich is to get a second Kwik Fit centre in addition to the existing site on Ranelagh Road. Penn Commercial and Coke Gearing have sold a half acre site in a prominent position on Ipswich's Nacton Road to national operator, Kwik Fit, for a new tyre and exhaust centre. Kwik Fit obtained planning permission in February and plan to begin development work on the site this month. EADT 9/3/10
- Ipswich is also set to get a new Tesco superstore following approval by planners. Members of Ipswich Borough Council's development and planning committee voted 6-7 – along party lines – to approve proposals for a

£70million regeneration project on Grafton Way. At the heart of the proposal is a massive new Tesco superstore – but it also includes 129 flats, two hotels with 247 bedrooms, four other shops, restaurants and cafes, and 700 car parking spaces. The decision will now have to be sent to the Government Office of the East of England (Go-East) for final approval. This could be delayed by the general election – but Tesco is hoping to be able to start work on the site in September and have the superstore ready to open its doors by Christmas 2011.

There are differing views on the proposal. Mike Cook, from the Ipswich Society, said the proposal would damage the town centre and would also increase congestion and general traffic problems.

Assis Carreiro, director of Dance East, spoke in favour of the application. She said: “We have created at Dance East a major attraction for the whole area. The proposal will bring much needed regeneration to an area that is in bad need of it, and there is the promise of £10million in environmental improvement in the whole area.” She said the development would boost the Waterfront as a whole.

William Coe, the chairman of Ipswich Central, opposed the application. He said: “This application is opposed by the majority of town centre businesses in Ipswich who are very concerned about its impact on the town. There is a development opportunity at Westgate Centre which would enhance the town centre and if this is rejected today we can press ahead with that proposal. Grafton Way is not in the centre of Ipswich and it will pull people away from the heart of the town.” EADT 4/3/10

- A new Tesco Express store has been officially opened on the spot previously occupied by the Racecourse pub on Nacton Road, creating a number of new posts. Advertiser, 18/2/10
- A newly refurbished office centre which provides a base for social enterprises was officially launched on 10th March, with forecasts of major growth for the third sector. The Brightspace complex off Hadleigh Road, Ipswich, has been created by community organisation Suffolk ACRE (Action with Communities in Rural England) to offer affordable office space, complemented by a wide range of business, administrative and technological support. Social enterprises are not-for-profit organisations committed to tackling social, environmental, cultural and economic challenges, and contribute an estimated £24billion a year to the UK economy. The Brightspace launch was attended by around 150 influential guests from across East Anglia. Social entrepreneur Craig Dearden-Phillips, founder of Speaking Up, delivered the keynote speech, and was joined by Jenny Crampton from Street Forge Workshops, a social enterprise which produces high quality garden accessories. Mr Dearden-Phillips said: “This is a fantastic facility and I am sure it will be the base for many good things in the future.” David Wheeler, chairman of Suffolk ACRE, said he and his fellow board members believed the opening of Brightspace was a “tremendously bold statement” in the current economic climate. Wil Gibson, chief executive of Suffolk ACRE, added: “We believe that if you bring organisations with shared values together you will see collaboration and some really good ideas developing. It is not just about accommodation; it is about providing support through partnering agencies to meet people’s needs in a supportive environment.” EADT 11/3/10
- Telecoms firm Unicom is creating 200 new jobs across the UK, including 30 in Ipswich. Unicom, which has a regional office on Old Foundry Road, supplies business telecoms and broadband services. Chris Earle, operations director, said the recession had led to many businesses looking to save costs on their utility bills. As a result Unicom had kept on growing throughout the economic downturn, and planned to continue recruiting with the recession officially over. “Ipswich has always been a terrific base for us to operate from due to a great local skill base and strong infrastructure,” he said. “We hope our initial drive to recruit 30 people in this region is just the tip of the iceberg”. EADT 20/1/10
- Trinity Park Events Ltd, the commercial arm of the Suffolk Agricultural Association, is recruiting more casual part-time staff. They are need to help run the in-house catering at the award-winning events centre as well as this year’s Suffolk Show on June 2-3, when it will be running the stockman’s, directors’ and press centre catering. EADT 20/2/10
- “Too many” shops in Ipswich are empty, a town centre organisation has said, following a report claiming that the rate at which they are empty stands at more than 9%. Ipswich fared better than many East Anglian towns in a retail vacancy survey by the Local Data Company. According to its figures, which were treated with scepticism by town centre organisations, Norwich fared worst with a 12.5% vacancy rate, while Saffron Walden was among the best at 5.5%. Paul Clement from Ipswich Central said the figures excluded many types of business but acknowledged that the town needed to be promoted to more retailers. “Our view at Ipswich Central remains that there are too many vacant units in Ipswich and we need to seriously promote the town as a whole to missing retailers bearing in mind the recent signs of economic recovery. EADT 20/2/10

MID SUFFOLK

- Plans to transform a community hospital site in Mid Suffolk are set to move a step closer as health chiefs search for potential developers. The £6million plan to redevelop the Hartismere Hospital site in Eye involves creating a 21st Century health centre, a nursing home, sheltered homes, and a housing development. Three years ago patients and residents protested when the last of the inpatient beds closed following a review of services. NHS Suffolk officials say approval is still needed for its Outline Business Case, which was submitted to the East of England’s Strategic Health Authority last year, and once that happens, it goes out to the tendering stage. They

will advertise for interested developers to come forward with proposals to build on the site. Once there is a small selection of suitable developers, negotiations will start and when one is chosen, the public will then get a chance to offer their ideas on the development. Conservative parliamentary candidate for Central Suffolk and North Ipswich, Dr Daniel Poulter, believes the community hospital should be reinstated to its former glory. "Some 60,000 people live within a 12-mile radius of Hartismere and are currently forced to travel long distances to receive basic medical services that would be better provided closer to home." EADT 10/3/10

- A playbus service that made regular visits to a strong of villages in Mid Suffolk has been forced off the road through lack of funding. EADT 25/2/10
- Mid Suffolk District Council is being criticised over plans to close a customer service access centre. Many people use the Customer Service Direct (CSD) access centre in Ipswich Street, Stowmarket, to pay their council tax, collect travel cards, find out about their benefits or pay their rent. The site, one of three in the district, faces an uncertain future as it is covered by a recent compulsory purchase order and is set to be demolished, along with several other buildings in Ipswich Street, as part of a major regeneration project. Members have agreed to further explore other possible ways to accept payment once the CSD centre is closed. It was suggested that many of the services on offer could be managed online or through a call centre, while a "shop front" presence could be established somewhere in the town, possibly shared with other partners such as Stowmarket Town Council or the police. EADT 16/2/10

ST EDMUNDSBURY

- Two more stores have signed up to open in the Arc shopping centre in Bury St Edmunds. The centre opened last year and is now almost completely full with a wide selection of stores, ranging from Fat Face to Waterstones. Managers at the centre have now revealed milkshake chain Shakeaway and the maternity and baby clothing company JoJo Maman Bebe are to open stores in mid March. The announcement over the two new shops comes just days after Delancey, which owns the Arc, confirmed it had put the retail complex on the market with a guide price of £70million. EADT 16/2/10
- According to a retail vacancy survey by the Local Data Company, Bury St Edmunds saw an 11.9% rate of empty town centre retail units in December, above the national average of 7%. However, Steve Peters, town centre manager for Bury St Edmunds, said: "We didn't agree with their figures last time and we don't agree with them now." The town's own survey produced a different tally of around 7% at present, he added. EADT 20/2/10
- Vion Food Group is again cutting large numbers of staff at its Haverhill processing plant. The company informed staff at the factory in late February that the proposed plans would result in 180 job losses, affecting both salaried and hourly-paid positions. The Little Wratting factory, formerly the Grampian Country Foods site, currently employs 387 staff, though this has fallen considerably in recent times, following large scale job losses in January 2009. Haverhill Echo 24/2/10
- The fully-attended toilet service in the Abbey Gardens, Bury St Edmunds, is set to close and be replaced with a "roving" system, with the loss of full-time jobs. St Edmundsbury Borough Council says it will save £30,000 with the measure, which is part of a wider £2.5million cost saving package. Some in the town claim the loss of full-time attendants in the town centre gardens, which attract tens of thousands of visitors each year, will leave some feeling less safe and could encourage criminal activity. EADT 25/2/10

SUFFOLK COASTAL

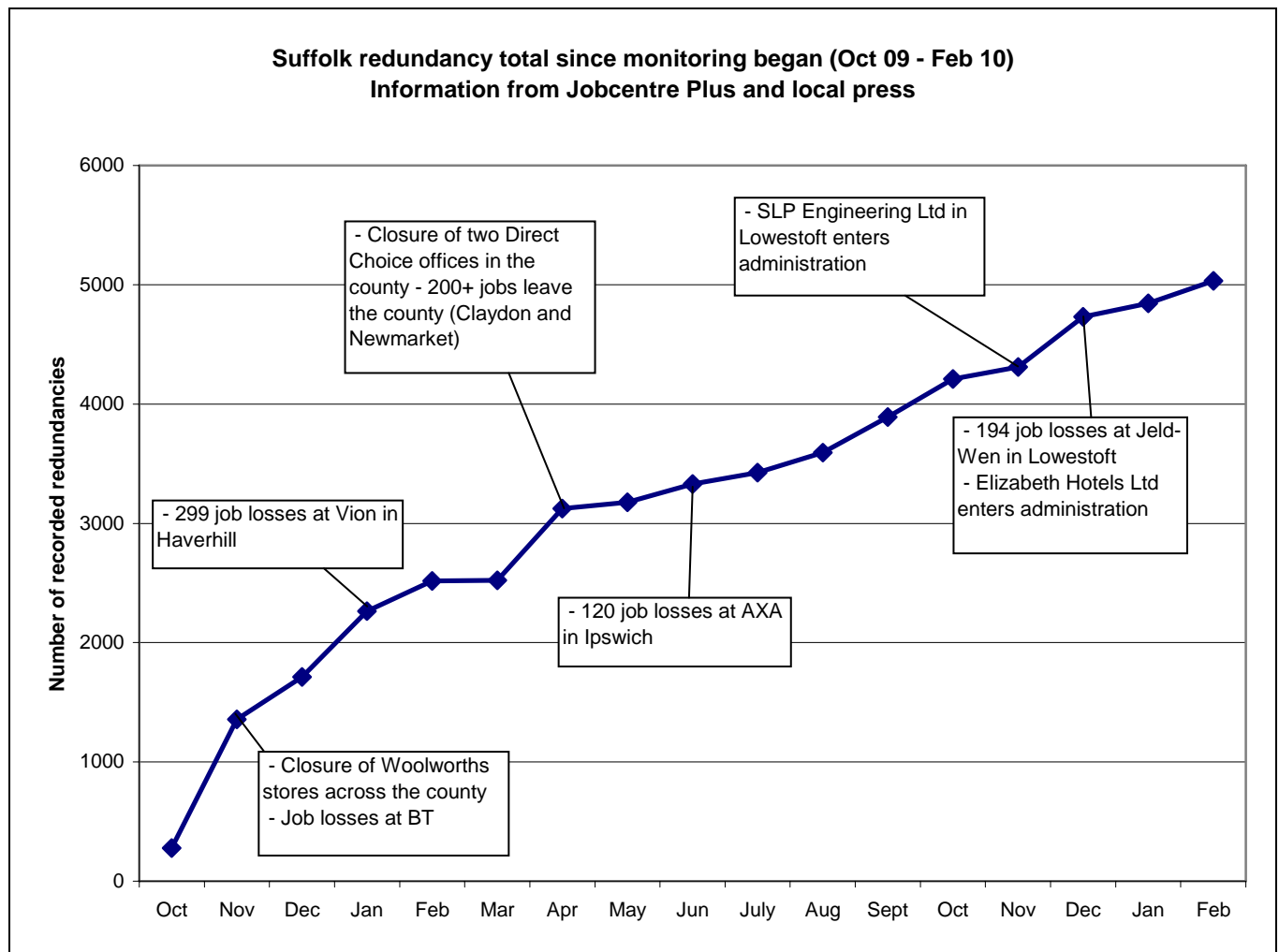
- A community scheme which aimed to regenerate an area of Aldeburgh has stalled after councillors refused to back the initiative. Aldeburgh Town Council has told the Oasis Project Community Group it cannot undertake further activity on the land it owns at the eastern end of Jubilee Walk. The Breathing Spaces scheme had allocated £10,000 to the project, but any work had to be agreed by the town council as it would be taking place on its land and it has now decided to refuse consent as the aim of the scheme was being presented differently to the way it was originally envisaged. EADT 3/3/10
- Work is continuing on the Felixstowe Futures project, which has the aim of regenerating and enhancing the urban fabric of Felixstowe and adjoining villages. A number of projects aimed at improving Felixstowe's fortunes are in development including public realm improvements such as the conversion of beach shelters into promenade cafés and the development of a coastal path, to long term projects including the revitalisation of the town's central public space The Triangle.
- Funding has also been secured from the Heritage Lottery Fund towards the cost of planning and developing a project to restore the seafront gardens in Felixstowe and a second bid is being prepared will then be submitted in February 2011. (Thanks to Joanne Chapman for these items)

WAVENEY

- The future of more than 400 jobs in Waveney has been secured with announcement that the government fisheries laboratories will be improved and refurbished. The Centre for Environment, Aquaculture and Fisheries Science (Cefas) in Lowestoft has revealed plans to invest in its headquarters in Pakefield Road so that it can upgrade its laboratories and stay in the town for the foreseeable future. Cefas, which is part of the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra), has been considering its options in the town since the collapse of the Waveney Campus partnership in December last year. Now rather than building a new headquarters, Cefas is going to invest in its existing building so that it can be used for at least the next five to seven years, with a longer-term decision likely to be made at the end of that period. However, the news leaves an air of uncertainty hanging over the prime waterfront site originally earmarked for the Waveney Campus as it had been hoped that Cefas would build a smaller scale development on the land, next to Lake Lothing. The site for the proposed Campus, off Riverside Road, has been empty for some time but Waveney District Council, which owns the land, is still confident that a buyer will be found. EADT 8/3/10
- Lifestyle fashion retailer Fat Face opened a store in Southwold in late February, creating eight new jobs. EADT 25/2/10
- A £1.5million development which will become home to Scottish and Southern Energy's (SSE) onshore operations and maintenance base for the Greater Gabbard offshore windfarm is now up and running at the old fish market in Lowestoft. The new building will eventually be home to about 100 staff including contractors who will be responsible for going out and maintaining the turbines. The base also has two wind cat vessels to take workers out to the turbines and very soon a helicopter will be delivered to the newly constructed hanger and helipad to also support the windfarm. (Thanks to Joanne Chapman at Waveney District Council)
- The Suffolk-based Hoseasons holiday brand is heading for United States ownership after its private equity owners agreed a US\$60million (£38.8m) sale. The self-catering specialist, which offers holidays at around 10,000 lodges, caravans and cottages across the UK, is being bought by US holiday company Wyndham Worldwide. Hoseasons, which is headquartered in Lowestoft and employs 280 staff, sells 300,000 holidays in the UK every year and has 15,000 properties across seven European countries. EADT 23/2/10
- Ambitious plans for the multi-million-pound South Waveney Healthy Living Centre to be built in Reydon, near Southwold, were given the go-ahead by Waveney District Council's development control committee on Wednesday night. The new building will include a medical centre with doctors, dentists and a pharmacy alongside a 60-bed residential care home. EADT 19/2/10
- Norbert Dentressangle - It was announced on 05/03/10 that 61 employees at Norbert Dentressangle, at Oulton Broad, near Lowestoft, will be entering into a 30-day consultation period before redundancies begin. The company, formally Christian Salvesen, was stunned when Birds Eye closed its pea growing operation in Suffolk and Norfolk last month. The plant was used as the freezing centre and would freeze an average of 30,000 tonnes of peas a year in a 24-hour operation from mid-June. Dan Myers, food business unit director, said: "As a direct consequence of Birds Eye ceasing its pea processing activities at our site in Oulton Broad I can confirm that we will be entering into consultation with employees. Mr Myers said the current operation could not sustain the existing staffing levels. Lowestoft Journal, 5/3/10
- The Lowestoft branch of Comet is set to close with all 12 staff being made redundant. The store is due to close early next month. A statement from Comet's paid tribute to the Lowestoft staff.
"We can confirm that 12 employees at the Comet store in Lowestoft have today (Wednesday) entered into a 30-day consultation period, in advance of the store's closure in April. Regrettably, the council recently installed planning permission signs in the store before briefings with the employees took place, and we sincerely apologise for the distress this must have caused. The decision to close the store is a commercial one and in no way reflects the hard work and commitment of the store's employees. Every effort will be made to redeploy the affected individuals within the Comet business or help them find alternative local employment."
It is not believed there are currently any vacancies at Comet stores in nearby Great Yarmouth or Norwich. The unit on the retail park is being taken over by UK specialist retailer in electronic components, Maplins, who have conducted their own recruitment for staff. Lowestoft Journal, 5/3/10
- With regards to the latest situation at SLP Engineering, the administrators at PricewaterhouseCoopers are currently receiving Expressions of Interest in the company with a closing date set for the end of April. There are approximately 1,000 people employed by the company at the moment (including contract staff) and once the accommodation block in the port has been completed (scheduled for June), after that they have no more contracts. Although not all of the current employees are from the local area there are fears over the knock-on effects for the town relating to the spend by those who come to work here from other areas during the week as they stay in local Bed and Breakfasts/Hotels and use local amenities. (Thanks to Joanne Chapman at Waveney District Council). So far, 27 redundancies have been made, all based in Tyneside, but with more (including locally) expected towards the end of March. (Jobcentre Plus)

What further signs are there of a second round of redundancies? (BIS have particularly asked for any information from local authorities)

In Suffolk there seems to be evidence that the rate of redundancies picking up again since November 2009. Our graph (below) shows a steady flow since October 2008, however the level of increase between November 2009 and February 2010 has not been quite as high as last winter.



National statistics in January saw a sharp fall in exports. Do you believe this is a blip, or a long term trend?

No evidence to comment on this in a Suffolk context.